443 The Waskuk trading place is situated at the end of the bared (canal) leading from the foot of the Waskuk mountain to the Sepik. [489] This varies according to the height of the river water. At high water canoes can come up to the very edge of the forest. At present the end of canoe navigation is 100 yds. out in the swamp grass.

"The market is held a few hours after sunrise for it takes more than an hour for the Waskuk to descend the mountain and about the same time for the Yambon to paddle up-river in their canoes. I reach the edge of the swamp grass shortly after 8 A.M. The Waskuk are before me, but the Yambon are not yet in sight. Four young men of Waskuk are seated on logs around a small fire. Twenty to thirty women sit in three groups apart from the [293] men without the benefit of the shade which the men enjoy. The women hold slabs of bark over their heads to avoid the sun and still wear their string bags even though they are sitting down. They talk among themselves as do the men with only a few remarks passing between the groups.

"After a few minutes wait, the heads of men poling in three canoes can be seen above the swamp grass. There are eight or nine canoes, but since the Sepik river women paddle sitting, these cannot be seen until they have reached the head of the canal. When they are all grounded and their paddles have been stuck upright in the mud alongside their canoes, the Waskuk women gather up their digging sticks and bark wrapped bundles of washed sago to walk through the ankle deep muck to the canoes. I follow shortly after with the men. The Waskuk women are busy setting up their digging sticks or, if they haven't one, a piece of bamboo of the same length. In front of these uprights each women deposits her forty to fifty pound bundle of sago and unwraps it. The food had about the consistency of roquefort cheese and stands up in a triangular lump when the bark wrappings [439] are removed. Its colour is gray or a dirty pink. The Yambon women now